
Frequently Asked Questions About Open Burning

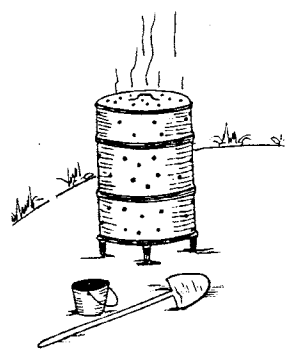
To burn or not to burn--that is the question, in many areas of Wisconsin. Is burning even allowed in your area, and if it is, is a burning permit required? Determining *if* you may burn and, if so, *what* you may burn can be confusing for Wisconsin citizens and business owners, who usually want to "do the right thing" but aren't quite sure just what the right thing is.

To help you comply with open burning rules and evaluate open burning of allowed materials as a waste disposal option, this factsheet will try to answer some of the most frequently asked questions about open burning, and why it's such a "burning issue" for many people.

Why do people burn?

In many parts of Wisconsin--urban as well as rural areas--burning has been the waste disposal method of choice for a significant part of the population for many years. People choose to burn for a variety of reasons, including:

- Waste collection service is unavailable or inconvenient in their area.
- They want to avoid the cost of waste collection services and/or landfill fees.
- They want to keep wastes out of the landfill.
- "We've always done it this way."



The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recently commissioned a survey on open burning behavior in Illinois. One-half of survey respondents cited convenience as the main reason they burn wastes. Almost two-thirds burn wastes once or twice a week, and about one-tenth burn wastes **every day** as a matter of habit. While the U.S. EPA has not conducted survey research on open burning in Wisconsin, it's likely that open burning behavior in Wisconsin is similar to open burning behavior in Illinois.

Why is open burning regulated?

There are important reasons why open burning must be regulated. Many harmful air pollutants can be emitted when some kinds of materials are burned. Burning can produce very toxic pollutants that irritate the eyes and lungs and can even cause cancer.



Burning debris is the number one cause of forest fires in Wisconsin, causing approximately 40 percent of forest fires each year--and burning garbage causes about 40 percent of the debris fires that lead to forest fires. Issuing burning permits allows the DNR and local governments to caution people about safe burning procedures and curtail burning if the fire danger gets too high. They also help keep track of where the burning is taking place in order to prevent "false alarms" or to respond more quickly should a fire get out of control.

Which DNR programs regulate open burning, and for what reasons?

Forestry - Regulates open burning in certain areas of the state where forest fire hazard is high, requiring burning permits in certain areas during some times of the year.

Solid Waste - The 1990 Recycling Act prohibits commercial, industrial and municipal facilities from disposing of any yard wastes by either landfilling or burning without energy recovery. It also prohibits the landfilling or burning of many recyclable materials such as paper and cardboard at these same types of facilities. The Solid Waste Management Program allows open burning of small amounts of woody materials *only* at private residences or at facilities which have received a special license.

Air Management - Bans all open burning with several specific exceptions.

The combination of Air Management's restrictive rules on open burning (which have been in place since 1970) and the Solid Waste Management Program rules means that open burning of most waste materials is prohibited under state law. And local ordinance can override--and thus prohibit--the few exceptions that are allowed under state law.

Why must people get burning permits or licenses?

The DNR Forestry Program, under Chapter 26, Wisconsin Statutes, and many local governments require burning permits to prevent forest fires and protect life and property. State laws and many local ordinances spell out the kinds of materials that may be burned and the conditions under which burning will or won't be allowed.

Local ordinances may require burning permits to minimize nuisance effects from open burning.

Burning permits are also designed so that people may burn only in areas where and at times when the risk of wildfire is not high. If a burning permit or license is obtained, it *does not* give authority to burn materials that are illegal to burn under state or local law.

When do people need a burning permit?

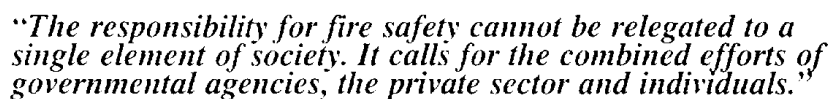
You may need to obtain a burning permit from a forest ranger, fire warden, other DNR designee or your local government whenever you want to start any kind of outdoor fire for any purpose *other than* cooking food or warming the body. This includes fires set in "burn barrels" and in licensed woodburning facilities. Campfires do not normally require a burning permit unless the DNR has issued an order imposing emergency burning restrictions, or unless prohibited by local ordinance.

Additional restrictions depend on whether the burning site is located in an extensive, intensive or cooperative fire control area (see map) or a municipality:

In ***extensive fire control areas*** you must obtain a burning permit during the months of January through May if the ground is not snow-covered, or at other times if emergency burning restrictions are in place. The Forestry Program has defined extensive fire control areas to include all unincorporated areas in Columbia, Crawford, Green Lake, Marquette, Portage, Richland, Sauk, Waupaca and Waushara counties, as well as parts of certain townships in unincorporated areas of Dane, Grant, Iowa and Oconto counties.

In ***intensive fire control areas*** you must obtain a burning permit at any time that the ground is not snow-covered. The Forestry Program has defined intensive fire control areas to include all unincorporated areas in Adams, Ashland, Bayfield, Douglas, Florence, Forest, Iron, Langlade, Lin-

coln, Marinette, Menominee, Oneida, Price,
Rusk, Sawyer, Taylor, Vilas and



Washburn counties--as well as parts of certain townships in unincorporated areas of these counties: Barron, Burnett, Chippewa, Clark, Eau Claire, Jackson, Juneau, Marathon, Monroe, Oconto, Polk, Shawano and Wood.

A *cooperative fire control area* is any area not included in either an intensive or extensive fire control area. In cooperative fire control areas, you must obtain a burning permit whenever the town board posts a requirement for such permits. The town chairperson and other appointed fire wardens may issue burning permits.

Your DNR forestry office can tell you whether your property is located in an extensive, intensive or cooperative fire control area.

Inside the limits of incorporated cities and villages, you may need to obtain a burning permit from the local fire chief before doing any open burning. Many cities and villages have local ordinances which prohibit any open burning at any time.

Townships and counties may also have specific ordinances and permitting requirements on open burning.

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For more information about what is or is not permitted in your specific situation, consult one of these DNR factsheets:

<u>Publication #</u>	<u>Title</u>
AM-196-96	Facts on Open Burning for Businesses, Industries & Municipalities
AM-197-96	Open Burning Guide for Individual Property Owners
AM-198-96	The Health Hazards of Burning Leaves
AM-199-96	Burn Barrels: An Unhealthy Method of Garbage Disposal
AM-200-96	Burning Buildings: What Firefighters Need to Know
AM-201-96*	The Bottom Line on Burning/Recycling/Landfilling in Wisconsin
AM-203-96*	Open Burning Guide for Family-Owned Farms

* In progress